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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHMFIS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 002177

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV MK GR

SUBJECT: GREECE/MACEDONIA: WHAT'S IN A NAME? (OR IN THIS CASE FLIGHT DESIGNATOR)

Classified By: POL Counselor Robin Quinville for 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This message has been cleared by Embassy Skopje.

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Summary  
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¶2. (C) On November 2, GOG aircraft carrying CHOD Grapsas to Belgrade diverted in flight to avoid overflying Macedonia, due to concerns with the flight designator code assigned by Macedonian authorities. The current Macedonian flight clearance system has been in place since 2002, and Macedonian flight designators begin with the three letters "MKD" per ISO standards; we are not aware of Greek objections to this designation. However, in this case, the Greeks claim that Macedonian authorities assigned a flight indicator which utilized "MK" and the Greek letter "delta" instead of "MKD;" Embassy Skopje suggests this may simply have been misinterpretation of bad handwriting. We fail to see how use of "delta" instead of "D" in a flight designation could be seen as a potential advantage to Skopje; however, the Greeks appear to have had sincere concerns. We report this incident as it highlights current Greek hypersensitivity and thQ mentaQ-----Q

¶3. (C) We followed authorities had sought to assign an "impertinent" and "unacceptable" flight designation to GOG aircraft carrying CHOD Grapsas to Belgrade for talks with his counterparts. Greek MOD sources reported that they had indeed rerouted the aircraft carrying Grapsas because of a concern with the flight designator assigned by Macedonia. They claimed that the designator had been "odd" in that it had used "MK" and then the Greek letter "Delta," something that they considered irregular and suspicious. Greek military authorities then consulted with MFA representatives who suggested rerouting the aircraft rather than accept an "objectionable designator" noting that this flight was taking place at the same time that UN Envoy Nimetz was leading talks between Greek and Macedonian officials in New York. The Greeks did not articulate, however, how the use of "Delta" instead of "D" in a flight designator could play to Skopje's advantage.

¶4. (C) Embassy Skopje has reviewed the situation and reports that Macedonia's current flight clearance system has been in place since 2002. As part of this system, all flights are given a designator that begins "MKD," per ISO standards. Macedonian authorities deny having sought to utilize the Greek letter "Delta" in place of "D" in the designator. Embassy Skopje further notes, however, that flight clearance numbers are hand written, and that there is a likely possibility that the letters were misinterpreted. Embassy Skopje Comment: It is also very possible, likely in fact, that the Macedonian in charge of the flight clearance used the Cyrillic &D8 which closely resembles the Greek

15. (C) Comment: We do not believe that the Greeks are inventing an additional "provocation" from Skopje; they appeared genuinely concerned that the Macedonians were up to something when they issued this flight designator. The Macedonians, on the other hand, are sure to find this whole episode baffling and will view it as an attempt by Athens to muddy the waters with overblown interpretations of non-existent or minor incidents. We report this incident because it highlights some of the key characteristics informing Greek/Macedonian relations: hypersensitivity and a zero-sum approach. The issue also highlights how small, unintentional actions can be misread, particularly with the Nimetz process underway. End Comment.

COUNTRYMAN